

Greeley Tribune

Protect natural resource of park

Tribune Opinion

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Estes Park Mayor John Baudek calls Rocky Mountain National Park a golden goose for Estes Park. We'll take it one step further. We believe that goose has laid a pretty nice egg for Weld County, as well.

That's why we think a bill offered by Sen. Ken Salazar and Rep. Mark Udall makes perfect sense. The proposal would permanently designate nearly 250,000 acres of the park as wilderness.

The designation would protect the land from developers or anyone else who would want to make a buck off it. And it wouldn't affect the park all that much: The land has been managed as wilderness since 1974. Way back in 1964, President Richard Nixon recommended that Congress designate more than 239,000 acres as wilderness.

The bill also would extend its protection to the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area.

Weld County needs these two jewels of Colorado, probably more than we realize. It would be impossible to measure what it means to our economy, but the park, less than a two-hour drive away, has certainly helped attract residents and maybe even businesses. In fact, one reason Promontory was so coveted by State Farm and ConAgra's officials was its sparkling view of the mountains, peaks that are located in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Longs Peak, the park's centerpiece, is the state's most popular 14er, and that's saying a lot, and the park attracts 3 million visitors a year. If nothing else, we're sure you've been up there once or twice. There's no doubt that it adds to our quality of life.

Unfortunately, Congress is pressed for time this year, and though this seems like an obvious easy decision for our representatives, apparently it's not. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, for instance, wants to see an economic impact study before she approves anything, something that's sure to put it off for at least one more year.

The thing is, we don't believe we can wait too long. As last week's Census numbers showed, northern Colorado continues to grow at an alarming pace. It can't be too long before someone starts wondering about putting trophy homes in the park. While approval of such a plan would be unlikely, we've been surprised before, as money always talks. This designation would, in fact, ensure that people don't lose their senses and start to believe that a house or 50 surely can't hurt the park.

After all, we all remember the fable about the golden goose.

In the end, greed kills it.

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